

Marines exert max effort during 6-week water survival course

CPL. JENNIFER BROFER
STAFF WRITER

Thrashing around in 10-foot deep water and gasping for every possible breath, each Marine struggled to stay afloat as an instructor, posing as a drowning victim, pulled them under the watery depths with all of his weight.

Each Marine was taught how to locate a certain pressure point on the arm in order to subdue the victim and swim them to safety—a skill that, if exercised properly, may be the determining factor in whether they sink or swim.

This is just one of the skills Marines learn during the six-week Marine Corps Instructor of Water Survival Course at the Depot Combat Pool, a class where Marines must overcome multiple mental and physical challenges in order to make it through and eventually pass on their water survival skills to others.

“This course puts them in situations in the water, which most people have never experienced,” said Staff Sgt. Jason Veach, a Marine Corps Instructor Trainer of Water Survival.

The first three weeks of the course is the conditioning phase, which incorporates conditioning swims, water aerobics and treading water. The Marines start off with a 500-meter conditioning swim in full camouflage utilities with their pockets unbuttoned to provide extra drag. After a certain number of laps, they gradually shed their uniform to reveal only their swim shorts, or “slick,” underneath.

“It’s miserable swimming in cammies ... everything balls up around their neck,” said Veach. “When they train in utilities it adds extra drag, so when they get down to their slick they go much faster.”

Students are required to tread water with a 10-lb. brick and swim underwater for 25 meters. For their final test, they must swim 2,000 meters in 33 minutes and perform a rescue in full combat gear, minus the rifle and pack.



Cpl. Jennifer Brofer
Sergeant Charles Latour, a 3rd RTBn. drill instructor, comes up for a breath as he swims the width of the pool 34 times using the crawl stroke in a conditioning swim during the Marine Corps Instructor of Water Survival Course Nov. 24.

Additionally, students are required to tread water with a 10-lb. brick and swim underwater for 25 meters. For their final test, they must swim 2,000 meters in 33 minutes and perform a rescue in full combat gear, minus the rifle and pack.

“If you’re a strong swimmer you can get by just fine, but when you put on the combat gear, it turns any swimmer into a novice,” said Veach.

Many Marines half-jokingly refer to the rescues as ‘legitimate drowning,’ but those who have attended and successfully completed MCIWS adamantly say, “It’s one of the hardest courses in the Marine Corps.”

“You’ve got your regular [physical training] sessions, and then you got this—it’s extreme swim-

ming,” said Staff Sgt. Jason Dunham, a 2nd RTBn. drill instructor who lost 15 pounds during MCIWS.

“There’s not one part of this course that’s easy – the only easy part is when they let you go home for the rest of the night,” Dunham added. “I’ve been in a lot of schools in my Marine Corps Career, and this one is definitely a smoke check.”

In order to pass the class, Marines must also pass a written test comprised of 80 questions and master the Techniques of Military Instruction, which enables them to give a class on how to properly execute the four life-saving swim strokes.

“They have to be able to balance the academic side with the physical side,” said Veach. “It takes someone who is willing to have full intensity on both sides of the course. If they’re strong in one side, but not the other, they’re not going to make it.”

Not everybody makes it through the class. In the most recent class, which graduated Thursday, 10 Marines started out and 9 qualified. Earning a spot in the class is a challenge in its own right.



Cpl. Jennifer Brofer
Sergeant Jeffrey Williams, a 3rd RTBn. drill instructor, rescues an instructor posing as a drowning victim who attempts to pull him under the water during the Marine Corps Instructor of Water Survival Course at the Depot Combat Pool Nov. 24. Once Marines graduate from the course, they are able to swim qual recruits and Marines up to Combat Water Safety Swimmer.

Prior to acceptance into the class, Marines must first be Water Survival Qualified, have one year remaining on contract, be American Red Cross and Standard First Aid Qualified and be screened by MCIWS personnel.

Once accepted, Marines meet up at the pool from 8 p.m. – 2 a.m. for six weeks, since the pool is used for recruit swim qualification and recreational purposes during the day.

Upon graduation, Marines become certified lifeguards for three years and

are able to swim qual Marines and recruits up to Combat Water Safety Swimmer, said Veach.

But, until graduation, it is an uphill battle for many students, as they struggle to complete each task, one swim stroke at a time. With every obstacle overcome, their fear of drowning diminishes and is eventually replaced by confidence, and with that, an added skill that may mean the difference between life and death.

Stay Marine ...

Visit your Career Planner today



Cpl. Jennifer Brofer
Sergeant James Long, an Indoor Simulated Marksmanship Training instructor, snaps in on an M-240G machine gun Nov. 26, while using the new Infantry Squad Trainer, a program that was recently installed at the ISMT. The IST program is part of the Fire Arms Training System and enables Marines to conduct exercises on virtual battlefields like Iwo Jima and Bosnia.

ISMT upgrades equipment, software

New gear gives PMIs ability to train recruits more accurately

CPL. JENNIFER BROFER
STAFF WRITER

The WFTBn. Indoor Simulated Marksmanship Training facility recently improved its marksmanship training capabilities by installing 12 new projectors and upgrading its simulated weapons and software – improvements that cost an estimated \$500,000.

The new projectors were installed in every room of the

ISMT and are a vast improvement from the previous bulky projectors, according to range personnel.

“They’re much smaller and a whole lot clearer and easier to work with,” said Sgt. James Long, ISMT instructor, who explained that maintenance to the new projectors is easier since they only have one light bulb to replace, instead of the usual three. “The quality of picture is far greater than it was before.”

In addition to the projectors, another Fire Arms Training System was installed in the rear of the building that includes three consoles, three large screens and an Infantry Squad Trainer -- a program that enables Marines to con-

duct more realistic training in virtual battlefields like Iwo Jima and Bosnia.

“It gives better explosions and a better feel for combat,” said Long. “We can do tactical scenarios, call for fire, natural gun fire and do a close air support mission. Anything you can do on a conventional battlefield you can do here.”

According to Long, the system also has the capability of linking to any other system in the Marine Corps.

“We can link up with anybody that has a system,” said Long. “We can link up in the building with different rooms and fight each other.”

Marines can also use the software’s battlefield scenarios to train before deploy-

ments, where the fighting is anything but simulated. For instance, Marine Wing Support Squadron-273 from MCAS Beaufort recently used the new system to train before an upcoming deployment. However, the main purpose of FATS is to aid in training recruits during Grass Week. With the recently-upgraded simulated weapons, Primary Marksmanship Instructors can get a better idea of where recruits need help, since wherever a recruits aims during shooting will be shown on the screen.

“It gives us more confidence and the tools we need to see if recruits can grasp the concepts of marksmanship,” said Long.